Assignment 2 – Gervasoni

**Title – Action Learning Planning Report and review of one article**

**Context**

From 2003 to 2006 substantive support was provided by DEECD for leadership and planning at the whole school and cluster level. This resulted in some schools and clusters accessing financial support through the Leading Schools Fund and Professional Leave Program to undertake projects that were focused on educational innovation aimed at improving student outcomes. Many schools elected to appoint school based coaches whilst clusters offered programs that focused on developing effective professional learning models that used ‘structured classroom observation’ as a vehicle for teacher learning. An example of one such program is T.O.T.A.L - *Teachers Observing Teaching and Learning*, a program that involved 12 Leading Teachers from across the Sunraysia Network who were released from their schools for 20 days across 2 years to develop a coaching model within their schools.

In 2007 the DEECD focus on improving student outcomes became more specific and direct support was provided for teachers in the classroom in the form of Teaching and Learning Coaches. This resulted in the appointment of 200 regional Teaching and Learning Coaches and 50 Ultranet coaches across 2008 to 2009. This initiative is currently in its second year and the initiative’s aim is to provide assistance to identified schools to bring about the changes in classroom practice that are necessary to improve student outcomes. The teaching and learning staff employed through the DEECD initiative are regional personnel and are placed in schools according to each region’s policy on placement of coaches within schools. Some regions have decided to place one coach in one school whilst other regions have placed coaches in a number of schools based on the needs of the targeted schools. This is also reflected in the allocation of coaches to teachers. Some regions have permitted the schools to choose which teachers will be coached whilst other regions have targeted particular teachers based on school data or identified areas of improvement documented in the schools Annual Implementation Plan/Strategic Plan. Each region is currently reviewing the coaching initiative with a view to deciding the future directions for supporting future student outcomes. One of the key indicators outlined in the evaluative overview focuses on the critical factors necessary in making ‘coaching’ a success in our schools.

**Establishing a need/problem**

The focus of this action research project will be on developing an ‘effective coaching model’ with a particular focus on the ‘*readiness’* of teacher to be coached. This is I believe, a crucial factor in developing an effective coaching model. An effective coaching experience would result in *transfer* of the learning undertaken into the classroom with a visible *improvement in student outcomes* and be structured so as to promote *sustainable* collaborative learning within the school.

Over the past four years I have worked as a school based and regional coach in a number of primary and secondary settings. My role as a coach in all settings has been to work with teachers either individually or in teams to focus on the ‘learning’ in an effort to make changes and/or improvements that result in improved student outcomes. In all of the settings I have worked in there seemed to be a lack of clarity surrounding the understanding of what coaches actually do. As a result regions and schools have been unsure of how to ‘use’ their coaches or who they should have ‘coached’. This has led to a number of problems. Initially many schools made coaching a ‘voluntary’ option for staff. Those wanting to be coached were able to work with a coach in their own time based on their own teaching and learning agenda. Whilst this worked for a short period of time with the early adapters jumping on board and improving their student outcomes through focused work with the coach, it soon began to falter as the coaches ran out of early adaptors and were faced with the remaining staff who were not as keen to give up their ‘free time’ to be coached. Although the early adaptors had had positive coaching experiences they were often burnt out from working with a coach in their ‘sessions off’ as well as before and after school and once they had completed working with a coach for an agreed period of time they were ready for a break from the extra work they had participated in feeling they had ‘been coached’. In most cases their coaching agenda had an individual focus and as a result their learning experiences tended to remain a personal matter that were rarely shared or presented collegiately.

The voluntary model also posed another problem for schools and coaches. It tended to create the illusion that the professional learning model of ‘coaching’ was optional and episodic; it was seen as an ‘add on’ to the teacher’s core business of teaching. As a result the majority of teachers were hesitant to take on anything that they felt added to what was already a very busy day. After working through the early adaptors coaches soon found themselves with very few people to work with and little work to do other than to promote the value of coaching to any audience who would listen.

It was at this point that coaches approached their Principals and Regions to seek some clarity about what coaching should ‘*look like’* in schools. Some regions decided to develop a coaching model that was based on the areas for improvement indicated in the school data. For example if the data suggested that there was a need for improvement in Year 7 & 8 Reading then the coach was placed in the Year 7 & 8 Learning Neighbourhood to work with all teachers in the neighbourhood with a focus on improving reading in their classrooms. Other regions took a more flexible approach and allowed schools to determine their own needs for improvement. However many schools misinterpreted the need for improvement and perceived the improvement to be that of the teacher and not the student outcomes. This unfortunately led to the development of what has been described as the ‘*coaching deficit model’,* where the coach is seen by leadership and staff to be the ‘fix it’ person and is subsequently placed with staff who are deemed in need of ‘fixing’. This had extremely negative connotations for not only the teachers who were classified as needing improvement but also for the remaining teachers who avoided coaching believing it to be a supervisory model of professional learning for inadequate teachers.

In all of the settings that I have worked in, both secondary and primary, a teacher’s ‘*readiness*’ to be coached did not appear to be a factor of consideration when matching coaches with teachers. It is important to recognise that ‘teachers are at different levels of readiness and commitment to engage in reflection and change (Hopkins, Ainscow and West, 1990). In the paper titled, ‘Coaching in Context’ (2008), written by Julie Boyd for the Teaching and Learning Initiative, the notion of whether a teacher is ready for coaching is explored. Boyd indicates that ‘matching the type of support required to the individual teacher is extremely important in assisting teachers to improve their practice’ (Boyd, 2002, p.15) and she states that, ‘coaching is not always the most appropriate form of support’ (Boyd, 2002, p.15). Coaching is a highly specialised model of professional learning that requires teachers to ‘look and listen’ to the learning in their classrooms in an effort to improve/refine their practice thus improving student outcomes. A graduate teacher may need the support of organisational, student engagement and curriculum assistance before they are ready to analyse the ‘learning’ in their classrooms. The Concerns Based Adoption Model (CBAM) (Hall, George and Rutherford, 1977; Hall & Hord, 1987; 2001; Holloway, 2003) provides a framework for determining the teacher’s concerns and readiness for change. For some teachers whist they may have an awareness of the benefits of coaching they may not be at the stage where it is an immediate concern for their development and survival as a teacher.

So in order for coaching to be an effective model of professional learning in our schools it is crucial that we explore the impact teacher ‘*readiness*’. Are there teachers who would benefit more from coaching than others if the purpose of coaching it to not only improve student outcomes but in the process develop reflective practitioners who are capable of leading and sustaining this change? ‘Readiness’ can consist of a number of factors; the teacher’s readiness for change, the teacher’s self efficacy and the impact this has on being coached and the teacher’s readiness to lead and sustain the model of reflective practice within their school.

**Establishing a collaborative framework**

Discussions with my mentor, Anne Robinson who is the Lead Coach for *Sunrayisa Mallee Schools Network*, and my current network team of regional coaches,demonstrated that there is a need to explore teacher ‘*readiness*’ if coaching is to become an effective and sustainable professional learning model. There was a general consensus from regional coaches that this was a crucial factor in ensuring that coaching remains a part of the professional learning culture in our schools, and that by working with teachers who demonstrated a ‘readiness’ to be coached there was an increased chance of ensuring that this mode of reflective practice was sustainable long after the externally placed coach had left the school.

Preliminary meetings with my network team have suggested that all coaches on team have agreed to explore the notion of a teacher’s readiness for coaching in an attempt to provide the region with an evaluation of the effectiveness of the current coaching model. The region is currently deciding how coaches will be placed in schools next year; one option being discussed is that coaches will become school based. Many of the coaches have concerns with this model as they feel that in some schools the coaching is not effective and fear being placed on a full time basis in one of those schools. As a team we would like to explore where coaching is working and where it isn’t and determine whether the teacher’s ‘readiness’ has had an impact on the effectiveness of the model.

We identified a number of factors that had to be taken into consideration when defining a teacher’s readiness;

* The teacher’s level of teaching experience
* The teacher’s sense of efficacy
* The teacher’s immersion in the school’s professional learning culture
* The teacher’s structural constraints and teaching load
* The teacher’s leadership ability and role within the school

‘Teacher efficacy measures the extent to which teachers believe their efforts will have a positive effect on student outcomes’, (Ross, 1992, p.51). The teacher’s level of experience, structural constraints, leadership ability and the school culture they are immersed in will all have an impact on their sense of efficacy. So in exploring a teacher’s readiness we felt that we could begin by focusing on the relationship between the teacher’s readiness and their sense of self efficacy.

As coaches we have collected POLT (Principles of Teaching and Learning) data which could be useful in gaining an insight into teacher efficacy, however in the initial stages we feel that it would be useful to gather some anecdotal data on the coachees experiences of coaching through the use of questionnaires and interviews. There was also a suggestion that we gather data from all levels of teachers both involved in coaching and not involved in coaching. Why was it that some teachers chose to be coached and others didn’t? Was this related to their ‘readiness’ or their perception of their ability to produce positive student outcomes?

It is anticipated that this team will meet fortnightly and operate in conjunction with Anne Robinson (Lead Coach – *Sunraysia Mallee Schools Network*)and the involvement of her team of regional coaches in Mildura. Both teams will be able to give a different perspective as they are operating from within two different regions where a different approach has been taken to match coaches with teachers. Loddon Mallee Region has identified teachers based on a specific focus derived from the schools data where as Southern Metropolitan Region has given guidelines to the schools but has ultimately left the matching of coaches and teachers up to the school.

**Starting to review the literature**

Although coaching has been discussed as a valuable model of professional learning within schools since the 1980’s when Lieberman, Miller, Joyce and Showers highlighted the need for professional learning communities that focused on the ‘core business’ teaching and learning, coaching is only just starting to become a part of our the professional learning culture within our schools in Victoria.

The DEECD is in its’ second year of the first official coaching initiative with plans to review and evaluate the program and make any necessary changes for 2010. Whilst the literature that has been produced from the department clearly outlines the program’s guidelines and responsibilities for all parties involved including; regions, regional network leaders, principals, coaches and teachers it does not reflect the implications of the teacher’s ‘*readiness*’ for coaching.

In the initial discussions with my mentor she directed me to the work of John A. Ross from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education in particular to an article titled, ‘Teacher Efficacy and the Effects of Coaching on Student Achievement’(Ross, 1992). I have used this article and its’ findings in the preliminary discussions with my coaching network team.

Ross’ study focuses on the relationship between teacher efficacy, coaching, and student achievement, in particular the mediating effects of teacher efficacy on the relationship between coaching and student outcomes in a small sample of grade 7 and 8 history teachers.

The hypothesis in this study suggested that student achievement would be higher in the classrooms of teachers who possessed high efficacy beliefs and worked more extensively with their coaches and that coaching and teacher efficacy would interact such that high efficacy teachers would benefit more from the ‘coaching model’ than low efficacy teachers. It was the last component of the study that was of particular interest to our team and resonated with our interest in determining the ‘readiness’ of the teacher for coaching.

Previous research on coaching has highlighted the benefits that coaching offers as a model of professional collaborative learning in schools. However, like Ross our team is curious to discover the conditions under which coaching is most effective and in particular ‘whether it is possible to distinguish teachers likely to benefit from coaching from those better off with some other form of school improvement’ (Ross, 1992, p.51).

The sample involved in Ross’ study consisted of 18 teachers, 36 history classes and 6 district coaches. It is interesting to note that the method used to match teachers to coaches was based on geography, similar to both of the models that will be explored in our action research. The task was for the teachers in the study to implement a new history curriculum guideline with the assistance of the coaches in an effort to improve the outcomes for the students in these classes. The resources provided for the teachers to enable them to implement the curriculum guideline effectively were; curriculum resources including print and non print texts, three half day professional learning sessions and contact with coaches.

The study measured three areas; student outcomes, teacher efficacy and coaching. An improvement in student outcomes was determined by testing the students on their cognitive skills in particular their ability to respond to questions on a test that involved content not used in the instruction. Teacher efficacy was measured using the (Gibson and Dembo, 1984) 16-item self report instrument. This instrument measured the teacher’s personal teaching efficacy; the extent to which they believed their efforts would have a positive effect on student achievement. The impact of coaching on teacher efficacy was measured through both a questionnaire and interviews conducted with the teachers. Our team has agreed that both questionnaires and interviews with teachers will be valuable in gathering data about the teachers we are coaching.

Whilst the results of the study confirmed that the students’ achievement was higher in the classrooms of teachers who possessed high self efficacy and interacted more extensively with their coaches, it did not confirm the notion that coaching was more effective with teachers who possessed high self efficacy. The study found that all teachers regardless of their level of self efficacy were more effective with increased contact with their coaches, however it is interesting to note that the range of coaching behaviours included in this study were substantially below the level recommended by coaching advocates and the perceived understanding our team has of the role of a coach.

This highlights our teams need to develop a common understanding of what coaching looks like in our schools. ‘Coaching’ as defined in the ‘Seven Principles of Highly Effective Schools’ (DEECD 2007), is a specialised practice where the coach uses purposeful questioning to move the teacher towards new understandings. A vital component of the coaching cycle is classroom observation and interestingly in Ross’ study there was an absence of classroom/peer observation, in fact only two teachers invited the coaches into their classroom and this was to role model and/or demonstrate a particular teaching strategy.

There seems to be a common misunderstanding in schools about the role of a mentor in comparison to the role of a coach. The coaches in Ross’ study worked with the teachers as experts in ‘content’ knowledge. Whilst a coach must have knowledge in various content areas their role is not to provide expert content knowledge to the teacher but rather to use their skill in questioning and reflection to allow teachers to see how the delivery of their content is crucial in ensuring that students are engaged and using higher order thinking to learn the content in the most effective way possible. Therefore, although the findings in this study conclude that all teachers with both low and high efficacy belief benefited from their interaction with a coach, I’m not sure that the teachers were actually being ‘coached’. The way the coaches interacted with the teachers in the study reflected a mentoring partnership where the imparting of expert knowledge was the basis of their interactions.

The study accurately reflects the misinterpretations of the coach’s role in many of the schools our team members are working in and highlights importance of the work by Julie Boyd in ‘Coaching in Context’, where she states that, ‘matching the type of support required to the individual teacher is extremely important in assisting teachers to improve their practice (Boyd, 2008, p. 15). Her table outlining the various teacher levels and appropriate forms of support clearly identifies ‘advanced professionals’ as teachers who are at the peak time in their development as teachers to embark on a coaching experience. It is the ‘advanced professional’ who is at the stage of their career where they are making conscious decisions about the effectiveness of their teaching and learning and the cognitive elements of a coaching relationship are vital if the teacher is to move forward in their development at this stage.

Ross’ study has enabled me to understand that when our team is exploring the ‘readiness’ of the teacher being coached we will have to ensure that the ‘coaching model’ is clearly defined if the data collected is to accurately reflect the ‘readiness’ of the teacher. I believe a starting point in my action research will be for the team to explore the notion of a teacher’s sense of efficacy using the instruments created by Gibson and Dembo (, Stein and Wang (1988) and McLaughlin and Marsh (1978). This will give the team a starting point to determine the types of teachers who are electing or being nominated to be coached. I am also interested in exploring the extended causal chain (McLaughlin and Marsh, 1978) - from teacher efficacy to teacher behaviour to student efficacy to student behaviour to student achievement through focused study on the teachers being coached through exploration of the comparison of teacher efficacy and summative data such as NAPLAN, ON DEMAND and reported VELS Levels.

Ross’ study stated that whilst ‘no previous study has linked teacher efficacy to coaching’ (Ross, 1992, p.52) such a link *is* credible. The ‘readiness’ of a teacher for coaching with a particular focus on their level of efficacy is crucial step towards understanding how coaching can be most effective. Our team agreed wholeheartedly with Ross’ statement that, ‘Teachers who believe they will make a difference are more likely to see coaching as an opportunity to expand and consolidate their teaching techniques. In contrast, teachers who see student learning as swamped by uncontrollable forces might regard coaching as nothing but more work. Similarly, teachers with strong beliefs in their own effectiveness would be more willing to accept the risk of negative feedback from a coach’ (Ross, 1992, p.52)’.

The need to define what factors make coaching most effective resonated in the findings of this study. Like Ross I am not questioning the power of coaching as a professional learning model however I do believe there is a need to discover more about the ‘readiness’ of the teacher to be coached in an attempt to establish a coaching model that is not only effective in our schools but sustainable.

**REFERENCES**

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